



# Reading Guide

## **After the Dance: A walk through carnival in Jacmel, Haiti**

Edwidge Danticat

## Synopsis

Edwidge Danticat had long been scared off from Carnival by a loved one, who spun tales of people dislocating hips from gyrating with too much abandon, losing their voices from singing too loudly, going deaf from the clamor of immense speakers, and being punched, stabbed, pummeled, or fondled by other lustful revelers. Now an adult, she resolves to return and exorcise her Carnival demons. She spends the week before Carnival in the area around Jacmel, exploring the rolling hills and lush forests and meeting the people who live and die in them. During her journeys she traces the heroic and tragic history of the island, from French colonists and Haitian revolutionaries to American invaders and home-grown dictators.

Danticat also introduces us to many of the performers, artists, and organizers who re-create the myths and legends that bring the Carnival festivities to life. When Carnival arrives, we watch as she goes from observer to participant and finally loses herself in the overwhelming embrace of the crowd.

Part travelogue, part memoir, this is a lyrical narrative of a writer rediscovering her country along with a part of herself.

## Reviews

“In *After the Dance*, one of Haiti’s most renowned daughters returns to her homeland, taking readers on a stunning, exquisitely rendered journey beyond the hedonistic surface of Carnival and into its deep heart.”

### Random House

“Here she shares with her readers a poignant and compelling view of the Jacmel Carnival, one of the Caribbean’s major carnivals --- rivaled with and compared only to Rio and Trinidad. She gives insight and deep-rooted analogies of historic content, exploration of the land in and around her hometown of Jacmel, and the traditions of the people themselves as a true native would tell it...The customs, social life, and other ménage of experiences associated with carnival represents an expressive attitude that inspires the people of this proud nation to shun struggle, forget present trouble... I feel that readers will feel as mesmerized as I was --- and feel as if you were there too.”

**Alvin C. Romer** on [www.bookreporter.com](http://www.bookreporter.com)

## About the Author



Edwidge Danticat was born near Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1969, and moved to New York when she was 12 years old.

She is the author of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; *Krik? Krak!*; *The Farming of Bones*; and *Behind the Mountains*, a young adult novel. She is also the editor of *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* and *The Beacon Best of 2000: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Colors and Cultures*.

## Suggestions for Discussion

The author's accounts of different experiences (visiting the graveyard, going into the mountains, etc.) interject throughout. Does this distract from or add to the story of the Carnival?

The characters represented at Carnival are said to show 'a symbolic journey between the present and a very distant past.' What kind of journey does the author go on? What journey do you go on as a reader?

' "Yes, it is a parade, an exposition, but it is also a way for Jacmel to tell its story. Every costume, every mask portrays a part of our story and concerns." ' Why is Carnival the medium chosen to do this?

Discuss Carnival as both a form of escapism (characters that imitate and symbolise others; where in the worst of times 'the musical groups had even larger speakers, blaring their carnival anthems even more defiantly. The voices sang louder, the people danced longer, as if to rebel against the extremely difficult circumstances.')

... and as a form of remembrance, identity and representation (why would they want to remember, for example, a military officer who imprisoned, executed and destroyed neighbourhoods, through Carnival characters?)

Everyone becomes involved in Carnival in some way. Why is it important to people? Why is it important to where they live?